

Starting Points edited by Henry Pluckrose

Let's Use String

Mary Seyd



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3rd Jan (M) Class Library.
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Evans Brothers Limited London

Read this first

Using string and fibres is not an expensive hobby but you will need to make a collection before you begin. Keep a box or bag handy and never throw away bits of string, rope, tape or netting. Dirty string can be washed and bleached.

Christmas would be a good time to start your collection. Try and think of people who would have string to throw away like caretakers in schools.

The natural colours of string can be effective but you may like to try dyeing string. The dye tins will have instructions for use.

There are so many varieties of string: thick and thin, rough and smooth, soft and stiff, strong and weak, shiny and dull, tightly wound or gently twisted. These words describe the texture and your experiments will be exciting if you make the most of these differences. Notice how string catches the light and is interesting to feel. Enjoy handling your string and then you will understand how it behaves. It does not like to be forced and you will need to experiment before you try to carry out any ideas.



Pull the string apart to look at the fibres



Sisal, separated and stuck to some card

You will need to collect some pieces of cardboard and some coloured paper of different thicknesses. White PVA glue is best for sticking string as it goes transparent when dry. You will also need some scissors and a damp cloth to wipe your fingers.

Simple experiments

Try these experiments using one kind of string only.

1. Pull a small piece out and compare it with the original string.
2. Fray one end and put some glue on the other end to stop it fraying.
3. Overtwist a length until it jerks into curly twists.
4. Tie a row of knots close together.
5. Tie a row of slip knots (see page 14).
6. Chop a length into the smallest possible bits.

You can probably think of other experiments yourself. Now get a long strip of coloured card and arrange your samples on it quite closely together. Remove your first sample and glue it to the card. You may need to put glue on the string as well as the card and hold it in place for a few moments.

It only needs to stick in places but you may find that some man-made fibres are difficult. Let the glue nearly dry first and then stick it in place using a weight to hold it until it dries.

The black and white photograph shows a series of experiments using sisal.



Stick your string pieces to some card

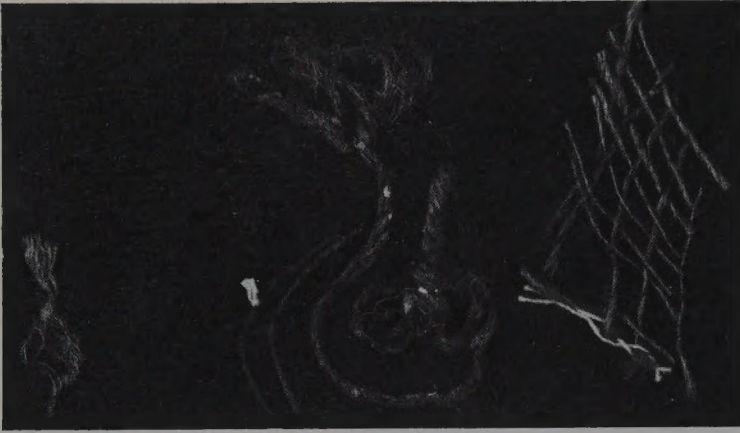


Sisal, plaited, cut, knotted, twisted and separated

Sisal fibres come from long, straight leaves. They make coarse, springy string and rope which is often used for parcels. Farmers also use it a lot for the binder twine because it rots easily if cattle eat it by mistake.

Man-made fibres do not rot and the animals can die if they swallow synthetic string.

Different kinds of string



Jute

Jute fibres come from plant stems. They are limp, grey-brown and finer and less strong than sisal. They are used for sacking and cheap string and rope.



Nylon

Nylon is a strong, man-made fibre. Fishing lines and sewing thread are made from a single strand or filament and cords and ropes of immense strength are made from many filaments.



Cotton

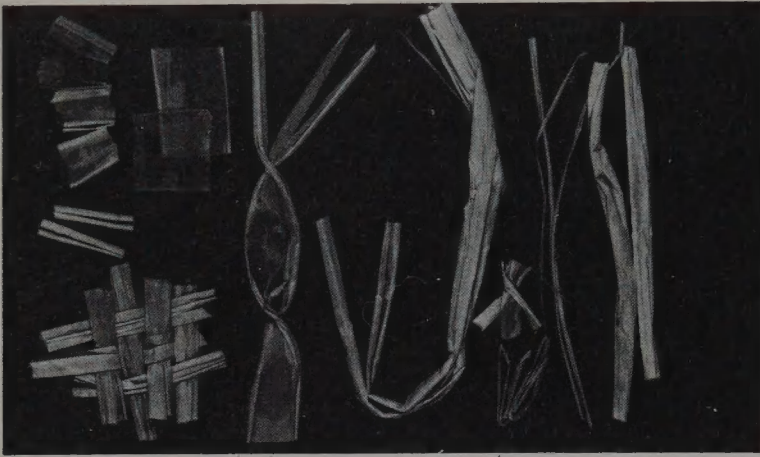
Cotton comes from a plant seed-head. It is spun into fine and coarse thread, corded into ropes and twisted into good string. Nowadays man-made fibres have mainly replaced cotton.



Other man-made fibres

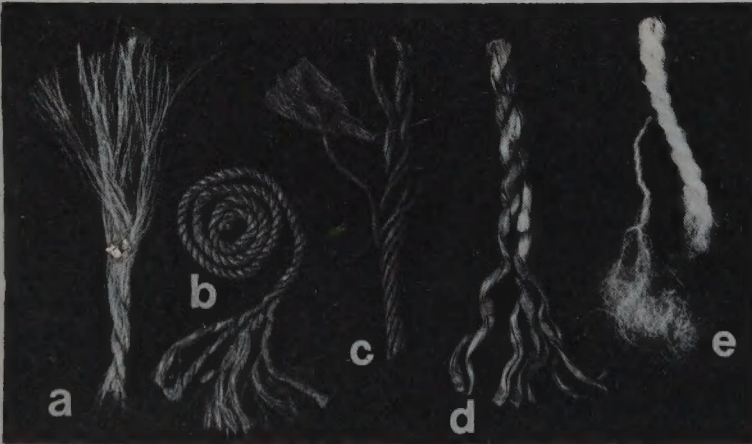
The ones shown here are called polypropylene which is made in shiny ribbons or strands which are then twisted together into string and rope. It is very light and will float.

Different kinds of string



Raffia

Raffia comes from the leaves of a tropical palm. It is used by gardeners and for weaving hats and mats.



Other fibres

- a. Hemp which is used for good ropes.
- b. Linen for fine cloth and weaver's yarns and strings. Made from nettles or flax.
- c. Paper string largely replaced by man-made fibres nowadays.
- d. Seagrass, used for chair seats.
- e. Sheep's wool, a springy fibre.



These untraveled pieces of string look like trees

When you have made a few samplers of different kinds of string choose two kinds which contrast well and arrange them in a pattern on some card. Look at the spaces in between so that they look good with the pieces you put down. If the spaces are too big it will spoil the effect. Don't be afraid to be simple. A simple success is better than a complicated failure.

Collage patterns

Gluing string on to a flat surface is called collage. You could begin at one edge and make a stripe pattern or go all round the edges working towards the centre to make a square. Or you could work out from the middle in circles or squares. If you think about what you are doing you will find out what looks good and what looks bad. Set yourself an exercise to do and this will help you to learn more about pattern. Later you can use these in a freer way.

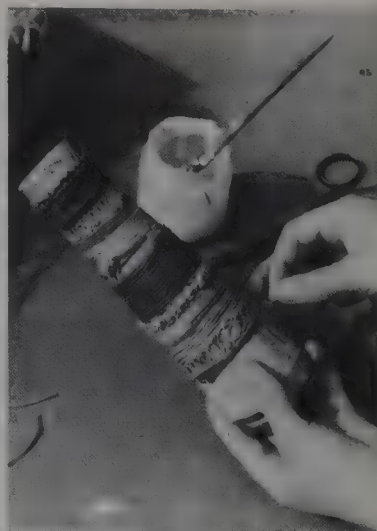
Instead of sticking on to a flat piece of card try experimenting with other shapes such as a cardboard tube, jar or box. These different shapes will suggest their own patterns to you.

Coiling and looping

You can make decorative borders with coils and loops. Sometimes it is easier to make coils between your finger and thumb before gently sticking down on a gluey card.



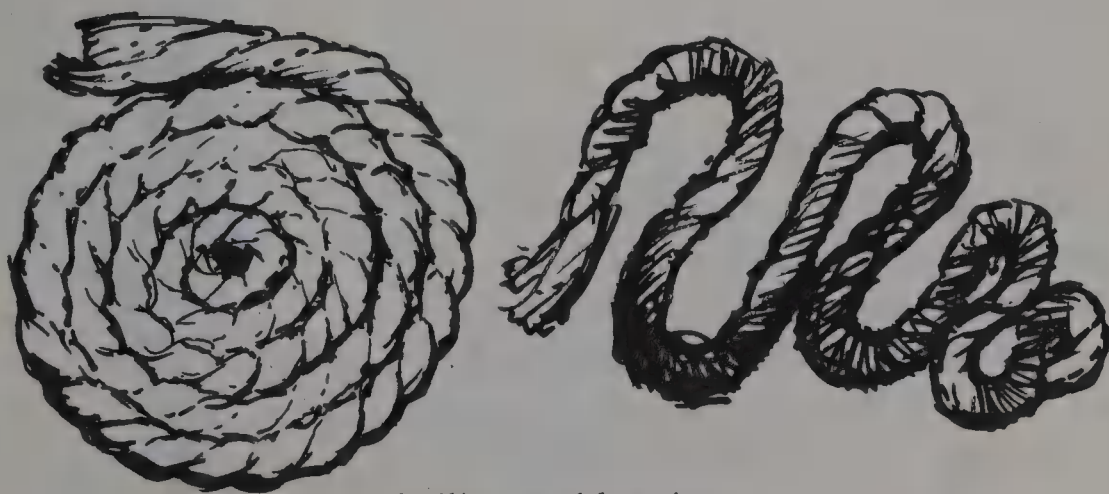
Look at the spaces between the string



A string collage round a bottle



A simple pattern using coiled loops and braid



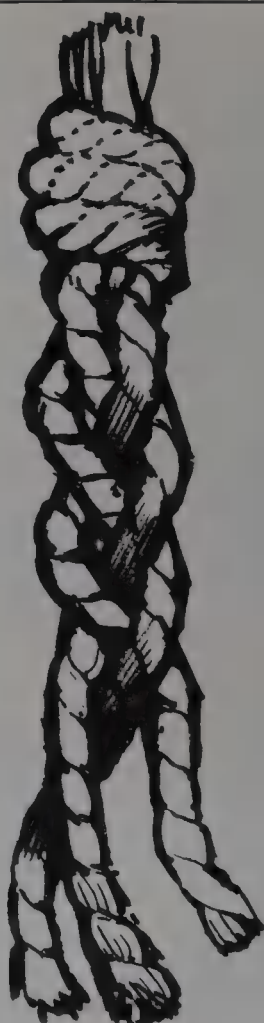
Coiling and looping

Overtwisting, plaiting and knotting

Overtwisting

When people buy hanks of wool they overtwist them, doubling neatly in half. Using this method you can make a piece of string much thicker and stronger.

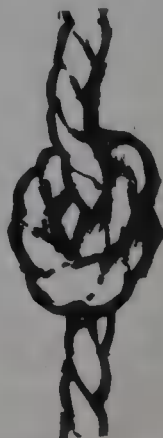
Take about 1 yd of string and tie the ends together. Put your hands in the loop and, keeping one hand still, start to turn the other so that you twist the string. Go on until it is quite difficult to turn, all the time keeping the twist straight and taut. Hold the middle of the twist in your mouth and put the two ends together, slipping one loop through the other. Let go the middle and if you have twisted the string really hard it will coil up neatly into a double cord. You can repeat the process to make a fatter cord.



Plaiting

Plaiting

Tie three equal lengths of string together at one end and then attach them to a door handle or a hook. Arrange the three strands in a row and start by putting the left strand over the middle one, then the right strand over the middle strand. The picture shows this much more clearly.



Single knot



A string collage using netting as well as string

Continue in this way until you come to the end of the strands.

Knotting

A row of single knots can make a piece of string change direction. Try putting the string through the loop twice to make a double knot.

Finger crochet and circular knitting

Finger crochet

Start by making a slip knot as shown in the picture. Hold the short, firm end in your left hand and pull another loop through the first loop and tighten it. It helps if a friend or your foot holds this taut. Carry on like this until a continuous chain is made. The first finger of the right hand acts as the hook and with a bit of practise you will get a good rhythm going. The loop pulled through needs only to be big enough for your finger to get through to make a further loop.

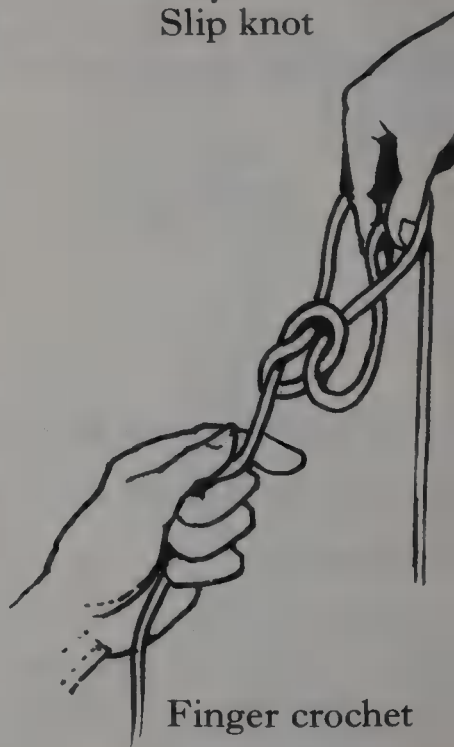


Slip knot

Circular knitting

You will need to find a wooden cotton reel to do this. Ask a grown-up to nail four or five panel pins into one end round the hole. Put the end of the wool through the reel and then make a slip knot round each pin as shown in the picture.

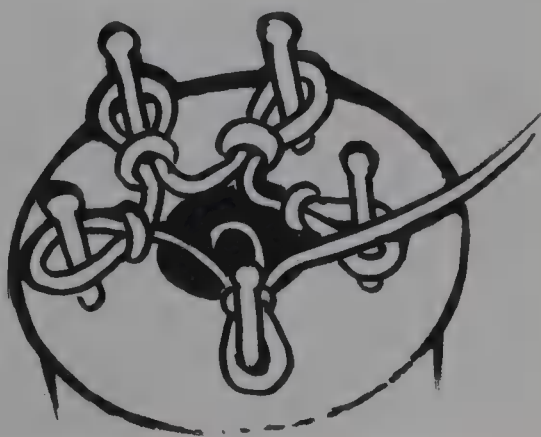
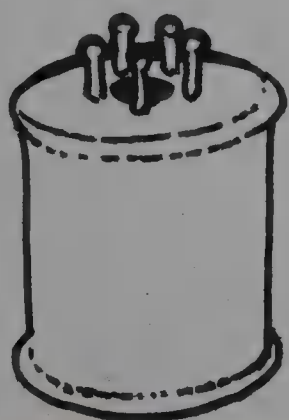
Wind the long end round the outside of the pins and, using a toothpick or small knitting needle, pull the bottom loop over the top thread and the pin top. Continue round the reel joining different colours as you go. Pretty soon a tube of circular knitting will come down from the central hole.



Finger crochet



A sampler using plaiting, knotting, twisting and coiling



Circular knitting

String pictures

Once you have discovered the shapes and textures you can make with string you will start thinking of pictures.

Certain kinds will obviously be more suitable to do in string than others.

Here are some suggestions:

Striped and spotted animals, hairy or furry animals, tropical birds, fishes and plants, patterned leaves, seeds and fruits, insects, butterflies and moths, trees and water.

Not every kind of string can be used for each of these ideas, your experiments will have given you some ideas of the kinds to use. Do not draw with string something which could just as well be drawn with a felt-tip pen or pencil.

You may like to add dried grasses or plants to your pictures.



String faces



Inspiration

As you get more experienced in using string in pictures and patterns you will need to make a collection of pictures which will give you ideas, as well as looking carefully at real things.

If you cut a rectangle from the centre of a piece of paper you can use this like a window as you look through magazines. Take a picture of some trees and move the window around on the page until you find a piece that really interests you and then try and interpret it in string. The black and white pictures will give you some ideas.

Start a scrapbook of pictures that interest you. You could add your own drawings as you think of them.



Leaves



Scaffolding



Trees



A string collage inspired by the bark of a tree

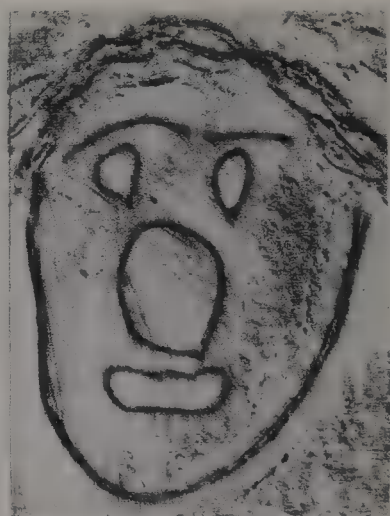
Rubbings and prints

To make a rubbing you will need to choose one of your string patterns or pictures which has a lot of interesting textures. Some patterns are much more effective than others. Can you discover which?

Take a sheet of strong, thin white paper and tape it to your collage. Hold them both steady and start to rub the edge of a black or dark coloured crayon firmly over the surface. Try to keep your strokes going the same way all over the collage. You will get an impression of your design.

To make blocks for printing with, you must stick your string on to very thick card or wood using Durofix or Copydex. These glues do not dissolve when they are wetted. Prints look best on thin paper, like tissue paper, and this comes in beautiful colours. The print will show through the transparent paper to give a reverse print.

Printing ink can be made from ordinary ink with a little Polycell paste added to thicken it, or powder paints. Try using different kinds to find out which print best on different



String rubbing of a face picture



This rubbing was taken from a collage which looked like the bark of a tree



Reverse prints made from one string block

sorts of paper. You can either use a brush to put the paint on the string or make a dye pad from a piece of foam rubber in a tin lid. Protect the table top with a thick pad of newspaper and hang your prints on a line with clothes-pegs to dry.

Reverse prints are fun to make. Fold your paper in half and print your pattern on one half. Before it dries fold over the other half and blot it.



A string print in clay



Patterns for cotton
reels

Pins and string pictures

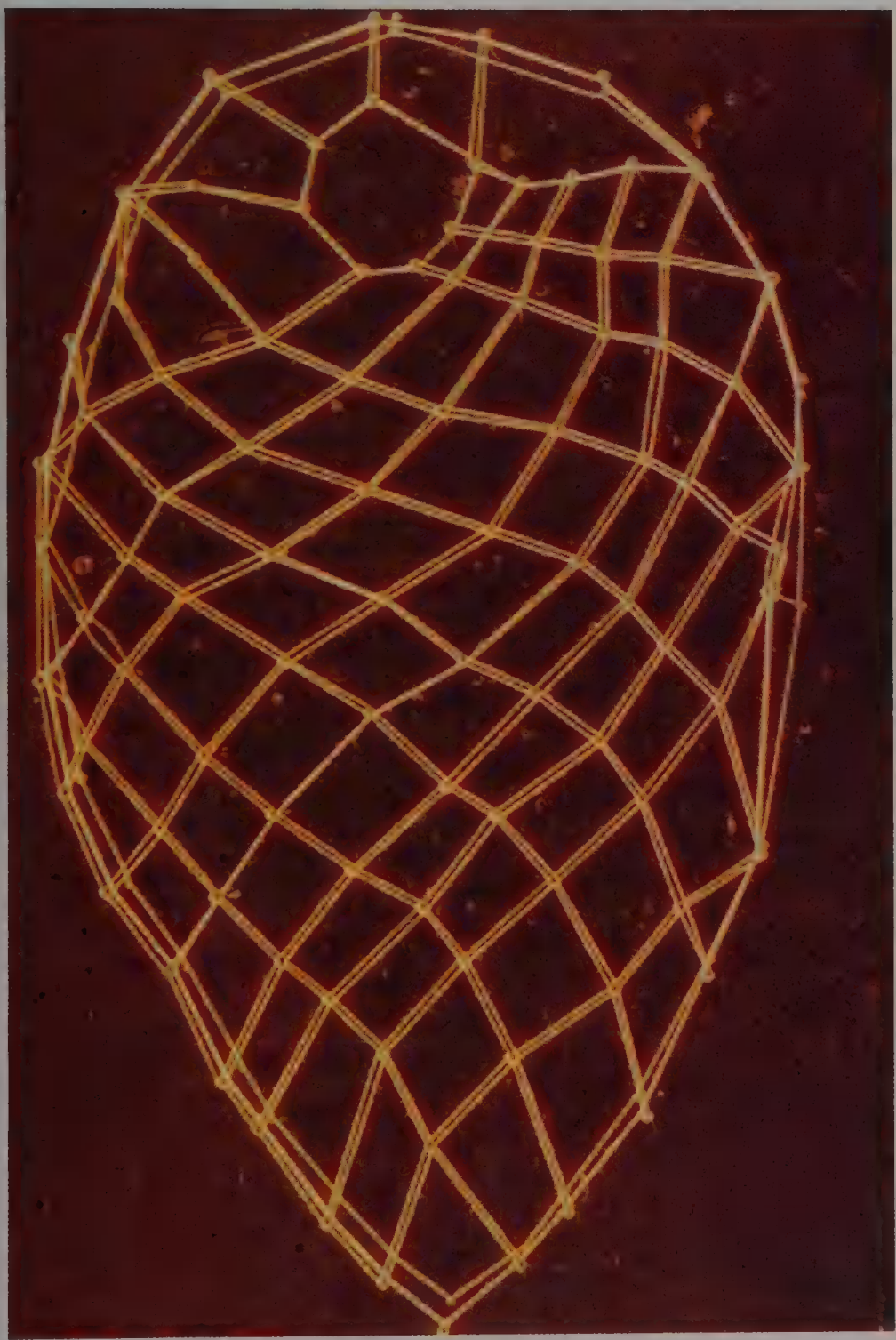
Instead of gluing your string to make a pattern you can wind it round pins instead.

You will need a piece of very thick card, the sort used in packaging, or a piece of soft board which can be painted or covered with some coloured paper. You will also need some panel pins or strong steel pins, a small hammer and a ball of fine string or cotton yarn.

Sketch your design roughly on paper and then put pins directly into the board to mark out the pattern or picture.

Tie one end of the string to a pin and then begin to wind the string round the pins. As you go you may need to add a few more pins to help your design.

You might like to experiment by nailing your pins in a row at each end of the board and winding your string up and down. When you have covered the board with straight lines start to weave other pieces of string, grasses and leaves between them.



A string and pins picture of a fir cone

Cobwebs

These are fun to make and look very pretty when you have finished. If you have a tree in your garden you might like to make your cobweb hang from some low branches. If you are working indoors you could hang it from the walls or across a doorway.

Start by crossing three or four long strings and knotting them where they meet and cross at the centre. Take a ball of string and, starting at the centre, begin to work round the web, knotting at each stretched thread. The circles at the centre should be close together, widening as you move outwards.

You could decorate your web by threading beads on to the string or use it for a party decoration and hang presents from it.



Knotting the string round the web



This cobweb was made to hang from the
branches of a tree

String shapes

You will need

Wallpaper paste

Vaseline or cooking oil

Balloons and polythene bags

Tissue paper

Sisal or jute string

Make up the wallpaper paste in a bowl.

Blow up a balloon or fill a polythene bag with water. Tie the ends.

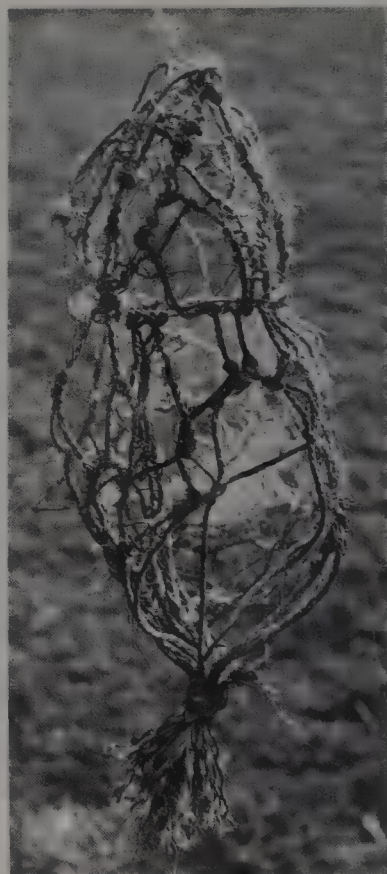
Smear the balloon with Vaseline or oil so that the string will not stick.

Tie several lengths of string together and dip them into the paste before draping them over the balloon and tie them again at the bottom. This will give you a framework to weave other pieces of string through. You can completely cover the balloon or leave spaces like netting.

When the paste has dried and the string is stiff, burst the balloon.

It can help to cover the balloon with a layer of tissue paper first, wetted afterwards with paste and the string wound over the top.

Instead of paste try using Polyfilla to get a different effect.



A string shape after the polythene bag has been removed.



Balloons covered with string. You can leave the ends to hang down like a tassel

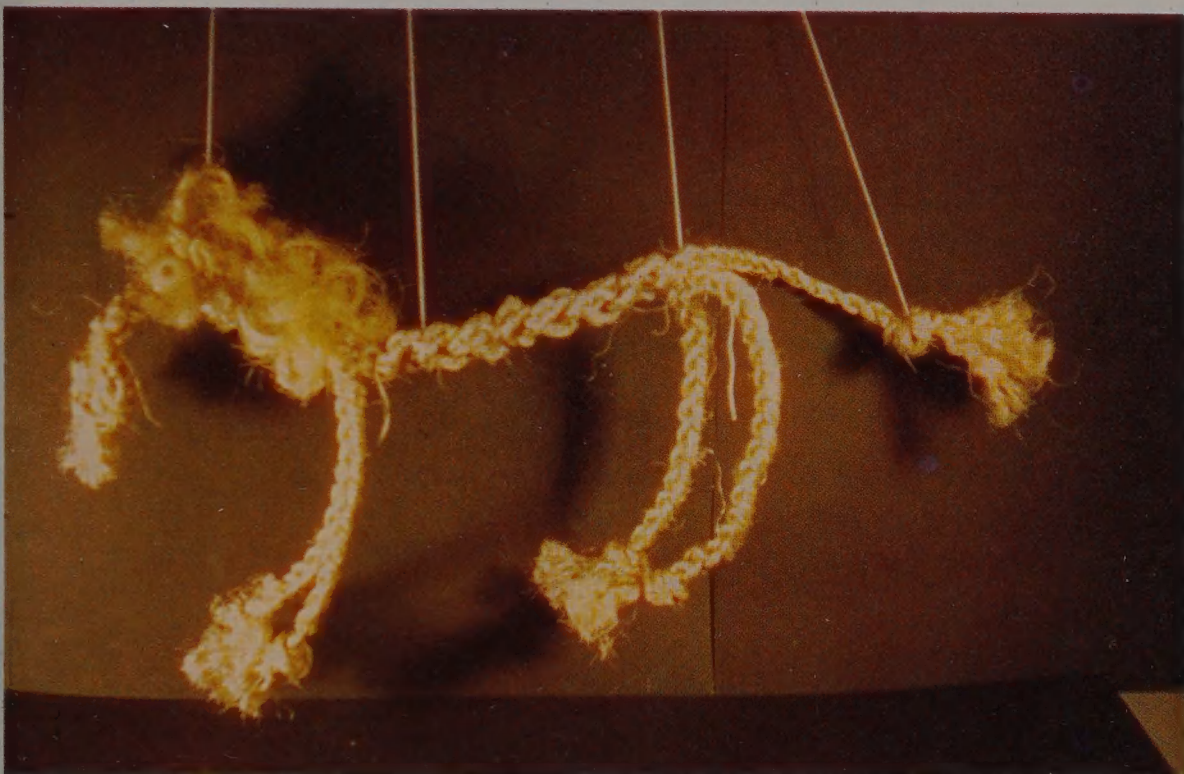
String toys and puppets

You will need to collect pieces of rope or thick string to make these and some pieces of fine string to bind the parts together.

The picture will give you some ideas to start with but as you begin to experiment you will find your own way of working.

You can bind arms and legs on with fine string or open up spaces between the fibres to push them through. Hair can be made by fraying the ends or by sewing on extra lengths. It is difficult to make really large animals or ones with long legs as the rope is not stiff enough to hold them up. A solution to this problem is to make them into puppets by attaching thin strings.

When you have made several animals or dolls you might like to stick them to a background to make a frieze. Decorate the background too.

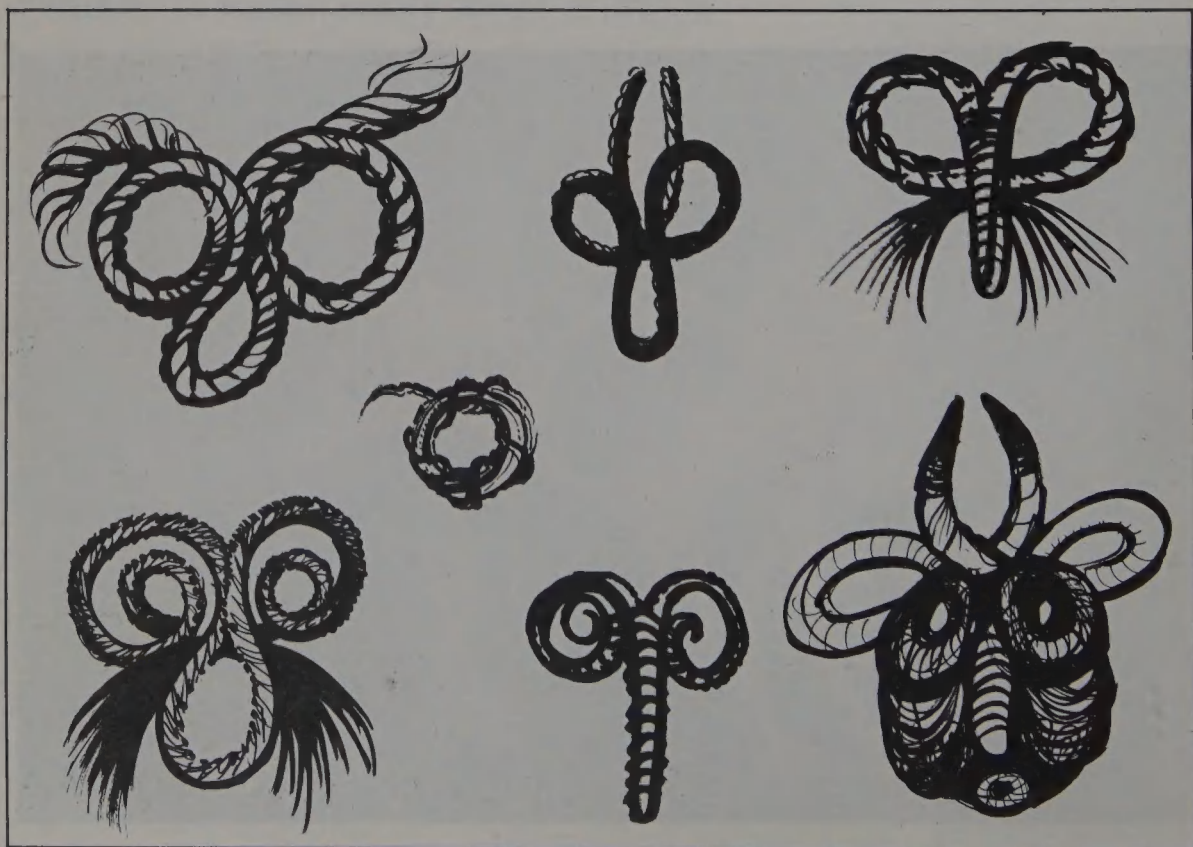


Masks

You can make some really exciting and dramatic masks by winding great hunks of rope about and binding it into shapes. Maybe you could find some old bits of rope on the seashore.

If you haven't got any rope try binding bundles of string together. Decorate your mask with coloured pieces of string, bits of cloth, fur or feathers.

These drawings may suggest ways of beginning to make a mask.





Starting Points – the new full-colour books which young children can use themselves. They explain in simple terms how to create pictures and how to experiment in many different ways with paint, crayons, paste, paper, clay and fabric.

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